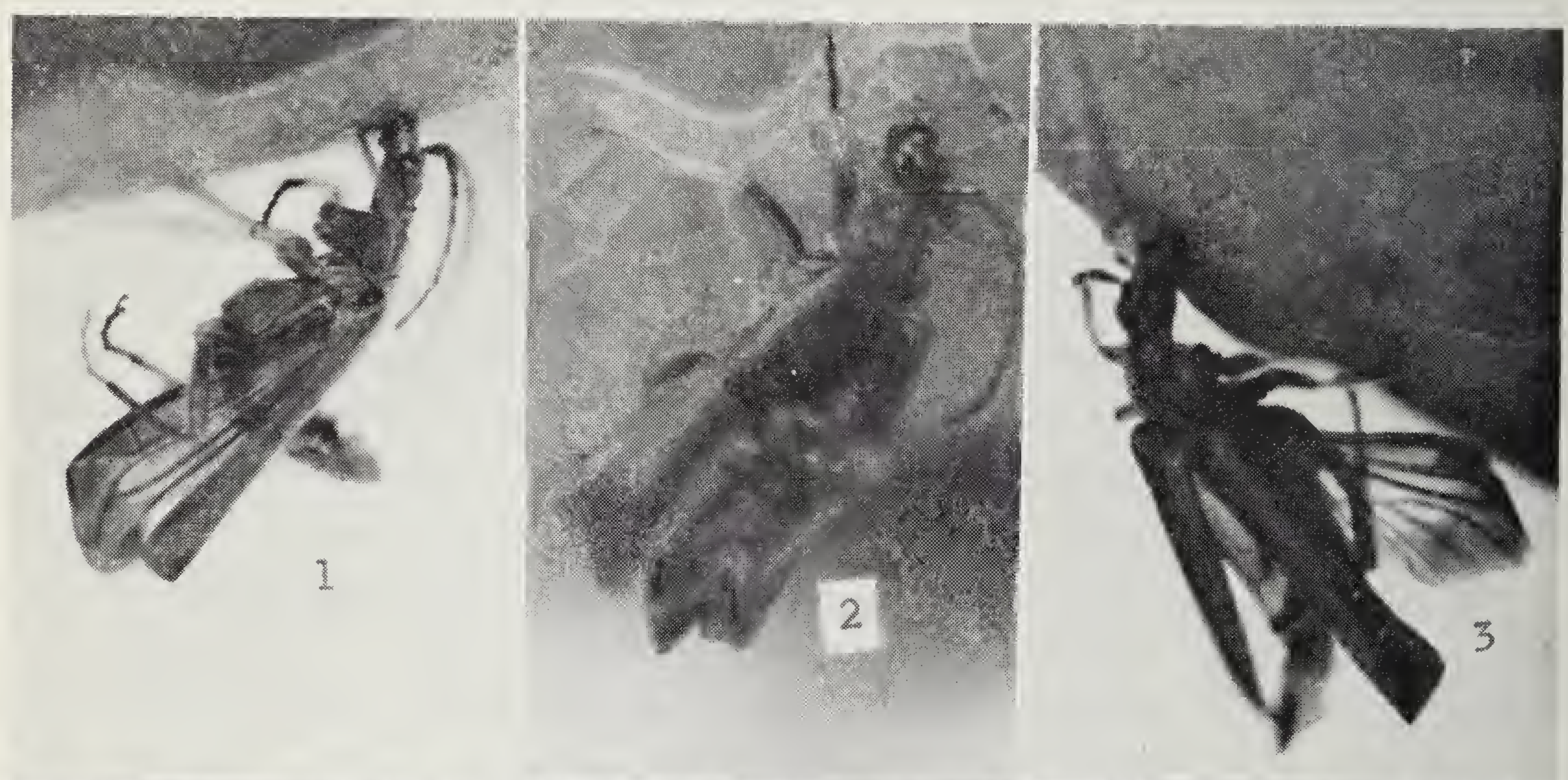
Violent Deaths of Podabrus[1] (Coleoptera: Cantharidae)

KENNETH M. FENDER

LINFIELD RESEARCH INSTITUTE
MCMINNVILLE, OREGON 97128

How often is it that an entomologist travels extensively in search of phenomena in his favorite groups, only to have one occur in his back yard (side yard in this case)? Such a situation confronted me this spring (1969) following the annual flight period of *Podabrus pruinosus* LeConte in the area.



Figures 1-6, Dead *Podabrus* attached to leaves by mandibles. Fig. 1, Lateral view of specimen showing abdomen thrust up; between wings and torn near apex, legs elevated. Fig. 2, Same specimen, latero-dorsal view, biting vein of leaf. Figs. 3, 4, and 6, Other specimens. Fig. 5, Specimen with abdomen missing.

---

[1] This study was supported by National Science Foundation grant: GB-6283X.

As I strolled meditatively in the side yard of my home, I noticed a dead *Podabrus pruinosus* in the underside of a leaf of a cork elm. It was grasping one of the main veins of the leaf with its mandibles. The abdomen was strongly thrust up between and separating the wings and elytra. Its hind legs were raised from the leaf. Later on it was ascertained that a piece had been bitten or torn from the side of the abdomen.

Before long, another was discovered similarly killed, then another and another, all *P. pruinosus.* Over twenty specimens, so killed, were found. They were mostly on cork elm, with a few on white oak and one on an ornamental dogwood. In nearly all instances the beetles were on the underside and near the edge of the leaf and in all cases were biting one of the larger veins of the leaf. All indications were that they were vainly trying to avoid the violent death that awaited them. All had a piece bitten or torn from the side of the abdomen. In a couple of instances the abdomens were entirely torn away. I do not know whether this removal was by the original predator or not. Possibly some later passer-by may have seen fit to partake of an available delicacy.

It may be that these are some of the more fortunate individuals that escaped a fate worse than death, that of becoming a host to the early stages of the attacker. They were tenaciously avoiding being taken as is evinced by the accompanying photographs.[2]

Unfortunately these observations were made after the annual flight period of *P. pruinosus.* The specimens had been dead for some time. Therefore, I have no clue as to the killer involved.

Never having observed this phenomenon of *Podabrus* before, I don't know whether it is a common occurence or not. I would think not, at least locally, or surely one of my family would have noticed and mentioned it. They are quite observant and interested in my work. Attempts will be made to ascertain the predator involved during the flight period of *P. pruinosus* next season.

---

[2] Photography by my son, William M. Fender.

FIELD NOTE

(Continued from Page 102)

Identification has shown the specimens to consist of 5 genera and probably 10 species as follows (numbers of each given): *Tricorynus rotundus* White—7; *T. dichrous* (Fall)—5; *T. confusus* (Fall)—1; *Protheca hispida* Lec.—12; *P. puberula* Lec.—3; *Petalium bistriatum bistriatum* (Say)—18; *P. seriatum* Fall—3; *Eutylistus intermedius* (Lec.)—7; *Caenocara oculata* (Say)—39; *C.* probably *oculata* (Say)—25; and *C. tenuipalpa* Fall—4.

Anyone who has collected beetles extensively will recognize the unusual nature of the above record. It is very infrequent that one is able to collect a variety of Anobiidae in large numbers, even for one as myself, who has concentrated on collecting them for some years.—Richard E. White, *Systematic Entomology Laboratory, Entomology Research Division, ARS, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.*